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Note verbale dated 6 May 2011 from the Permanent Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

The Permanent Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations presents its compliments to the President of the Economic and Social Council and has the honour to submit herewith its voluntary national presentation on the implementation of the internationally agreed goals and commitments on education, entitled "Venezuela: the world's largest classroom", for the annual ministerial review to be held during the high-level segment of the 2011 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council (see annex).

This national report will be presented by the Minister of the People's Power on Education during the voluntary national presentation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, to be held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, on 5 July 2011.

The Permanent Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Council under item 2 (b) of the provisional agenda.

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Annex to the note verbale dated 6 May 2011 from the Permanent Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

[Original: Spanish]

Voluntary national presentation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the Economic and Social Council on the implementation of the internationally agreed goals and commitments on education

Venezuela: the world's largest classroom

Contents

		Page
	Summary	4
I.	Introduction	7
II.	Education in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela	9
	A. Principles governing education in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela	9
	B. Education in the framework of the Simón Bolívar National Project	10
	C. The Organic Law on Education	11
	D. Organization of the education system	11
III.	Achievements and strategies in the field of education	12
	A. Achievements and strategies in basic education	13
	B. Achievements and strategies in university education	19
	C. Achievements and strategies in the cultural sphere	23
IV.	Experiences in the framework of international cooperation	23
V.	Remaining challenges	27
	Bibliography	28

Summary

In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, education is a human right and a fundamental social duty; it is democratic and liberating. It is enshrined as such in the Constitution, which was approved by the people in an exercise of its sovereign powers through a referendum held on 15 December 1999. Education is compulsory and free from the preschool (kindergarten) level to the intermediate level, and undergraduate university education is also free at State institutions. At all levels, education is converted into a social inclusion mechanism that ensures the full integration of vulnerable groups.

At the present time, after 11 years of the Bolivarian Revolution, Venezuela has not only made progress toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in respect of education, it has also turned itself into "the world's largest classroom". Of the country's 28,384,132 inhabitants, more than 10 million, or 37 per cent of the total population, are currently enrolled in educational programmes of one kind or another at the various levels of the education system.

The progress achieved in the field of education during the Bolivarian Revolution has been manifest: (a) 1,706,145 men and women have learned to read and write, with the result that the literacy rate is now 98.55 per cent; (b) school enrolment has increased by 24 per cent since 1999; (c) the net preschool enrolment rate has nearly doubled, from 53 per cent in the 1998-99 school year to 71 per cent in 2009-10; (d) the net primary school enrolment rate increased by seven percentage points between 1998 and 2010, reaching 93 per cent in the 2009-10 school year; (e) the numbers of pupils beginning Grade 1 and continuing through to the final grade of primary school increased by 18 percentage points over a period of six years, reaching 35 per cent in the 2009-10 school year; (f) the net intermediate school enrolment rate was 72 per cent in 2009-10, a 24 per cent increase compared to 1998-99; (g) at the intermediate level, enrolment in science and the humanities rose by 98 per cent during the Bolivarian Revolution, while the corresponding increase for technical training programmes was 76 per cent; (h) enrolment in special education increased by 257 per cent between 1998-99 and 2009-10; (i) indigenous people have been integrated into the education system, which recognizes and respects their cultures (at the present time, 110,851 indigenous persons are enrolled in the system, attending schools some of which are within indigenous areas and others elsewhere); (j) university enrolment increased by 192 per cent between 1998 and 2010: in the former year there were 735,285 students attending universities, while by 2010 the total had increased to 2,293,914; and (k) in 2010, 70.3 per cent of all students attending university were enrolled at State-run institutions, while 29.7 per cent were enrolled at private institutions. This situation indicates a reversal of the former trend toward the privatization of higher education.

In addition, the Bolivarian Revolution has a number of other significant achievements to its credit in the field of education, including the proclamation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as an illiteracy-free territory and the fact that the country has been recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as ranking fifth world-wide, and second in Latin America and the Caribbean, in terms of its gross university enrolment rate.

Not only have strategies been introduced into the formal education system, but cultural management has been consolidated throughout the country, which is advancing toward the democratization of culture and the integration of population groups that have traditionally been excluded from the cultural sphere.

In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, education is the main strategic factor in the task of upgrading social welfare as well as the key to promoting full social participation by both women and men, without discrimination of any kind, and equality in gender relations. Under the Constitution, gender has no effect on an individual's status before the law (article 21), and equality between men and women is a recurrent theme throughout. Furthermore, the educational traditions of indigenous peoples are recognized and respected through the institution of a system of bilingual intercultural education.

The Constitution states that education is a public service, and that it is pluralistic and grounded in respect for all lines of universal thought. The purpose of education is to promote the full development of the student's personality for the greater enjoyment of a life of dignity sustained by an awareness of the ethical value of work and active participation by human beings in all processes of social change, on a basis of solidarity.

To these ends, the Venezuelan State has instituted an ongoing, incremental social investment process designed to ensure that education is available for all and compulsory from the preschool level to the intermediate and diversified levels. It is also free up to the undergraduate level. Education has thus become a foundation-stone for the purposes of the State, in accordance with the recommendations of UNESCO.

The development of public policy in the field of education has brought about far-reaching changes in the ways knowledge is accessed, constructed, produced, transmitted, distributed and used. This is particularly true of university education, which has been reinstituted as a humanistic endeavour serving to guide the integral training of human talents within a transforming, participatory and inclusive process characterized by constantly critical thought.

These achievements are owing primarily to the policy of abolishing registration fees at all State-run educational establishments, the implementation of the school meals programme (from which 4,055,135 pupils benefited in 2010, up from 119,512 in 1998, for an increase of 3,293 per cent), the introduction of educational missions (Robinson I, Robinson II, Alma Mater and Sucre), the building of 4,037 new State schools, a 161 per cent increase in the number of teachers, and the strategies that have been successfully designed and implemented at all levels and modalities of education.

Particularly significant among these strategies have been the introduction of the Simoncito programme in preprimary education, the Bolivarian Schools at the primary level, and the Bolivarian Secondary Schools and Robinsonian Technical Schools at the intermediate level. Another aspect that should be emphasized has been the integration of information and communication technology as a feature of curriculum development in primary education.

Noteworthy innovations in the university education subsystem have been municipalization and the launching of the Robinson I, Robinson II and Ribas educational missions, the aim of which is to resolve the issue of school exclusion in

primary, intermediate and diversified education, and the Sucre and Alma Mater missions, which are strategies for the universalization of university education through municipalization. This consists of a public policy aimed at offsetting regional disparities by bringing education into communities.

In 2010, six university institutes of technology were converted into the first six regional polytechnic universities. Five universities were established in Venezuela between 1989 and 1998, while between 1999 and 2010, the Revolution has established 25 official institutions of university-level education. Nineteen of these are national experimental universities, while the other six are conventional universities.

The establishment of specialized universities has been particularly noteworthy. These include the Experimental University of the Arts, the National Experimental University of Security, the Bolivarian Military University of Venezuela, the Venezuelan University of Hydrocarbons, the Jesús Rivero Bolivarian Workers' University, and the Sports University of the South. The establishment of the Paulo Freire Latin American Institute for Agroecology and the Mayor (AV) Miguel Rodríguez University Institute of Civil Aviation have been other significant achievements. In addition, 32 national training programmes have been organized, and two indigenous universities have been founded.

Venezuela's international cooperation is predicated on the effort to build a multipolar world, with a fundamental concern to promote a Latin American and Caribbean union and the establishment of strategic political, economic and cultural alliances with a view to fostering the proliferation of new power groupings and thereby contributing to the advent of a new global geopolitical configuration.

Education has been viewed as a strategic factor for cooperation on a basis of solidarity and unity among peoples. Accordingly, interinstitutional relations and international mobility for students and instructors have been encouraged and joint training and research projects developed. International cooperation initiatives have included the Cuba-Venezuela Convention, the International Robinson Mission, the Grand National ALBA Education Project, the cooperation agreement between the People's Republic of China and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the international scholarships programme, university degree recognition agreements, and cooperation with Africa.

The strategic priority informing Venezuela's international cooperation effort in the field of education is relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, both bilateral and multilateral. In addition, priority is given to South-South relations with Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

As will be clear from the foregoing discussion, Venezuela can reasonably be said to have become "the world's largest classroom".

I. Introduction

After 11 years of the revolution initiated by the advent of the Bolivarian Government in 1999, Venezuela has not only made significant progress toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, it has also turned itself into the "world's largest classroom". Of the country's 28,384,132 inhabitants, 10,384,132, or 37.46 per cent of the total population, are currently enrolled in educational programmes of one kind or another at the various levels of the education system.

A breakdown of these figures shows that in 2010, 1,563,117 children were enrolled in preschool institutions, 3,428,351 children were enrolled in primary schools, 2,254,935 adolescents were enrolled in intermediate schools, and 207,265 children were enrolled in special education classes. In addition, 110,851 children were enrolled in the bilingual intercultural education system and 2,293,914 students were attending universities. In the field of adult education, 14,829 students enrolled in the context of the first Robinson Mission (Robinson I), 297,833 in the context of Robinson II, and 462,251 in the context of the Ribas Mission[1].

In Venezuela, education "is a human right and a fundamental social duty" enshrined in article 102 of the Constitution, which was approved by the will of the people through the participatory, democratic process of a national referendum held on 15 December 1999. With this new conception of education as a basis, the main objective of State policy in the field of education has been to make it universally available through the social integration of every individual living in Venezuela.

Article 102 goes on to state that education "is democratic, free of charge and compulsory. The State assumes responsibility for it as an imperative function that is of the utmost importance, at all levels and in all modes, as an instrument of scientific, humanistic and technological knowledge in the service of society." Accordingly, education has been the target of a social investment process on a priority basis.

In accordance with our basic law, then, education is a public service, one that is pluralistic and grounded in respect for all lines of universal thought. The purpose of education is to promote the full development of the student's personality for the greater enjoyment of a life of dignity sustained by an awareness of the ethical value of work and active participation by human beings in all processes of social change, on a basis of solidarity and in a Latin American, Caribbean and universal perspective. Accordingly, education is integral, of high quality, and permanent, and is accessible all on a footing of equality to all, including in particular persons with disabilities, indigenous persons, women, migrants, persons in detention and members of other vulnerable groups.

To these ends, the Venezuelan State has instituted an ongoing, incremental social investment process designed to ensure that education is available for all and compulsory from the preschool level to the intermediate and diversified levels. It is also free up to the undergraduate level. Education has thus become a foundation-

[1] Gender equity is enshrined in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The concept is expressed throughout the text by the use of the feminine forms of words in accordance with a principle of equality and non-discrimination as set forth in article 21. In view of the length of this report, however, for strictly methodological reasons and in accordance with Economic and Social Council guidelines, the feminine gender is not distinguished herein.

stone for the purposes of the State, in accordance with the recommendations of UNESCO.

In 11 years, the Bolivarian Revolution has unquestionably realized substantial achievements in the field of education. The following are particularly noteworthy: (a) 1,706,145 men and women have learned to read and write; (b) the net preschool enrolment rate increased by 28 per cent between 1999 and 2010, with 1,400,000 children currently in the system; (c) over the same period, the net primary school enrolment rate increased by 7 per cent; (d) the intermediate school enrolment rate increased by 24 per cent, and (e) university enrolment has grown by 192 per cent in the course of the past decade.

These achievements have been realized owing primarily to the implementation of a series of public policies, including in particular the abolition of registration fees at all State-run educational establishments throughout the country, the implementation of the school meals programme, and the introduction of educational missions[2]. The purpose of the missions designated Robinson I, Robinson II and Ribas is to resolve the issue of school exclusion in primary, intermediate and diversified education, while the missions designated Sucre and Alma Mater are strategies for the universalization of university education through municipalization. This consists of a public policy aimed at offsetting regional disparities by bringing education into communities.

The development of public policy in the field of education has brought about far-reaching changes in the ways knowledge is accessed, constructed, produced, transmitted, distributed and used. This is particularly true of university education, which has been reinstituted as a humanistic endeavour serving to guide the integral training of human talents within a transforming, participatory and inclusive process characterized by constantly critical thought.

This voluntary national presentation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the Economic and Social Council on the implementation of internationally agreed goals and commitments on education outlines the Government's successful effort to turn the country into "the world's largest classroom". It also provides an overview of the new concept of education, achievements to date, the strategies and good practices that have been implemented, and international cooperation. Challenges that remain to be overcome as Venezuela's educational revolution is strengthened and consolidated are summarized in the last part of this report.

We may note at this point that the work of preparing and drafting this national report was characterized by extensive participation and interaction, with input not only from educational institutions but also from the National Institute of Statistics under the coordination of the Ministry of the People's Power for Foreign Relations. In addition, six workshops were organized for that purpose, including a final national presentation workshop at which the draft report was discussed.

[2] These educational missions are a component of the social missions that have been implemented by the Bolivarian Government since 2003. Social missions are large-scale strategies designed to safeguard people's fundamental rights, with emphasis on marginalized population groups. These initiatives receive significant financial support, and are characterized by interinstitutional and interministerial coordination. A central feature of all of them is that the target communities must play an active leadership role in their planning and implementation and subsequent follow-up measures. Their essential purpose is to confront the causes and consequences of poverty and exclusion, with the active participation of the people concerned.

The workshops were attended by various officials, including senior personnel from the Ministry of the People's Power for Foreign Relations, the Ministry of the People's Power for Education, the Ministry of the People's Power for University Education, the Ministry of the People's Power for Indigenous Peoples, and the Ministry of the People's Power for Planning and Finance, teachers, students, children and young people of both sexes, the various United Nations agencies accredited to Venezuela, national specialists in education, directors and beneficiaries of educational missions, and the independent national expert. As a contribution by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the task of making productive use of voluntary national presentations, a systematic account of the methodology developed during the preparation and drafting of this report and the procedures and results of all the workshops are appended hereto in the Annex.

II. Education in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

A. Principles governing education in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, education is a fundamental human right. In 1999, the Venezuelan people, exercising its sovereign powers through a national referendum, approved the Constitution now in force with the ultimate aim of reconfiguring the Republic to establish a multiethnic, multicultural, democratic, participatory and proactive society in a decentralized federal State based on justice, one that would consolidate the values of freedom, independence, peace, solidarity, the common good, territorial integrity, coexistence and the rule of law for the present and future generations.

Article 102 of the Constitution states, "Education is a human right and a fundamental social duty; it is democratic, free of charge and compulsory. The State assumes responsibility for it as an imperative function that is of the utmost importance, at all levels and in all modes, as an instrument of scientific, humanistic and technological knowledge in the service of society."

In Venezuela, education is deemed to be a public service. Under no circumstances is it regarded as a private commodity subject to market laws of supply and demand, and as such the result of commercial transactions depending on individuals' ability to pay.

Another innovation showing how far the new Constitution represents an improvement on its 1961 predecessor is its recognition of education as something that continues throughout life: on the one hand, education is now compulsory from the preschool (kindergarten) level through the intermediate level, and on the other hand, it is free from preschool to university at State institutions.

In Venezuela, education is liberating in that its essential function is to prepare new individuals for active participation, with full awareness and solidarity, in individual and social transformation processes.

The distinctive education of indigenous peoples is recognized in article 113 of the Constitution through the institution of a system of bilingual intercultural education that combines formal education with traditional indigenous approaches and features the use of indigenous languages as well as Spanish.

Education in Venezuela is also a social investment, and as such fosters full participation by and integration of the most vulnerable population groups, including indigenous people, Afro-Venezuelans, children with special educational needs, and persons with disabilities. Moreover, education is the main strategic factor in the task of upgrading social welfare as well as the key to promoting full social participation by both women and men and equality in gender relations. Under the Constitution, gender has no effect on an individual's status before the law (article 21), and equality between men and women is a recurrent theme throughout.

Venezuela's standard-setting statutes with a bearing on gender issues include the Organic Law on Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence and the Law on the Protection and Promotion of Breastfeeding, which provides that "fathers and other family members shall provide all necessary support and encouragement to enable mothers to exercise this human right for the benefit of their sons and daughters." The Bolivarian Republic has a mechanism for the integral protection of maternity and paternity, regardless of the civil status of the mother or father, and access to a full range of family planning services based on ethical and scientific values, including the educational aspect in particular; this mechanism consists of a decree, namely resolution 1762 issued by the Ministry of the People's Power for Education on 9 October 1996, which provides that pregnant girls attending school are entitled to protection. Under article 2 of the decree, "No pupil shall be denied access to or expelled from an educational establishment on the grounds of previous failure, pregnancy, conduct or discipline, religion, parents' civil status, absence of a uniform, non-possession of school supplies, or any other grounds not established by law."

As a means of supplementing the provisions of article 103 of the Constitution, the Venezuelan State has instituted an ongoing social investment process designed to ensure that education is available for all and compulsory from the preschool level to the intermediate and diversified levels. It is also free up to the undergraduate level. Education has thus become a foundation-stone for the purposes of the State, in accordance with the recommendations of the United Nations.

B. Education in the framework of the Simón Bolívar National Project

The Simón Bolívar National Project includes education as one of its fundamental components, laying down policies, strategies and projects aimed at "overcoming poverty and integrating all persons in a situation of extreme poverty and maximal social exclusion." The project includes a policy of ensuring that education becomes deeply rooted in society and is accessible to all, and to that end it formulates a number of strategies aimed at:

(a) Ensuring that all school-age children are enrolled in school, with emphasis on marginalized social groups;

(b) Ensuring that pupils remain in school and pursue their education;

(c) Strengthening environmental education, cultural identity, health promotion and community participation;

(d) Upgrading infrastructure and provide schools with academic and sports facilities;

(e) Ensuring that the education system conforms to the socialist production model;

(f) Strengthening and encouraging research on the educational process;

(g) Developing bilingual intercultural education;

(h) Ensuring access to knowledge in order to make relevant higher education available to all.

This policy has been the basis for designing specific programmes and projects which have enabled the Government of Venezuela to progress in its task of building the socialism of the twenty-first century, the ultimate goal of which is "supreme social happiness".

C. The Organic Law on Education

A new Organic Law on Education was promulgated on 15 August 2009. Under article 2 of the Law, "Education is public, social, free, of high quality, secular, integral, permanent, socially relevant, creative, artistic, innovative, critical, multicultural, multiethnic, intercultural, and multilingual."

The Organic Law on Education defines the aims of education as follows: (a) to develop each human being's creative potential for the full exercise of his or her personality and citizenship; (b) to develop a new political culture grounded in proactive participation and action to strengthen the power of the people; (c) to develop individuals on the basis of a geohistorical approach aimed at instilling awareness of their nationality and sovereignty; (d) to promote respect for human dignity and training informed by the ethical values of tolerance, justice, solidarity, peace, respect for human rights and non-discrimination; (e) to encourage the growth of ecological awareness with a view to preserving biodiversity and social diversity; and (f) to educate pupils in, by and through liberating social work from an integral standpoint.

D. Organization of the education system

The education system of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is defined in article 24 of the Law as "an organic, structured entity comprising a number of subsystems, levels and modalities corresponding to the successive stages in human development." It is organized into a number of educational subsystems, all of them closely interrelated, and each of them given material expression in the form of State-run and private institutions. It is systematic, flexible and integral in nature, and it ensures equal opportunity and equal conditions by integrating all pupils within its several subsystems, with attention to multiethnic, intercultural and multicultural diversity and to special education needs. Its focus is the humanistic, social, environmental, participatory, proactive and collectively responsible human being. It is divided into two subsystems, the basic education subsystem and the university education subsystem.

The basic education subsystem

This subsystem is organized into different educational levels: preschool, primary and intermediate. The preschool level comprises the kindergarten and preprimary levels, which are for children between 0 and six years of age. The primary level comprises six grades and leads to the primary education certificate. The intermediate level is divided into two options: general intermediate education, which is a five-year programme, and technical intermediate education, which comprises six grades.

The basic education subsystem is also organized into modalities, which are defined in article 26 of the Organic Law on Education as "variant forms of education aimed at persons who, because of their characteristics and the specific conditions of their integral development, including cultural, ethnic, linguistic and other aspects, require, permanently or temporarily, an adapted curriculum suited to the needs of the several educational levels. Modalities include special education, youth and adult education, frontier education, rural education, art education, military education, intercultural education and bilingual intercultural education."

In the 2009-10 school year, there were 28,692 schools in the basic education subsystem in the country as a whole. Of these, 82.67 per cent (23,719 schools) were State-run, while 17.33 per cent (4,973 schools) were privately run.

A total of 7,735,815 students were enrolled in the basic education subsystem in 2009-10, including 6,078,510 who were enrolled in State-run schools and 1,657,305 who were enrolled in private schools. A breakdown by educational level and modality shows that there were 1,563,117 children in preschool education, 3,428,351 in primary education, 2,254,935 in intermediate education, 282,147 in youth and adult education, and 207,265 in special education[3].

The university education subsystem

The university education subsystem is divided into undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and it, too, features State-run and private institutions. This subsystem comprises experimental and non-experimental universities, autonomous universities, and university institutes and colleges.

A total of 2,293,914 students were enrolled at Venezuelan universities in 2010, including 2,184,327 undergraduates and 109,587 graduate students[4]. Most of these (1,611,497, or 70.3 per cent) were enrolled at State-run institutions, while the remaining 681,967 (29.7 per cent) were enrolled at private institutions.

III. Achievements and strategies in the field of education

The progress achieved in the field of education since the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution has been manifest for all subsystems, levels and modalities. In the course of the past 11 years, Venezuela has turned itself into "the world's largest classroom", advancing toward universal education through increased enrolment, better school performance, and declining dropout rates.

[3] These figures do not include enrolment in the context of Bolivarian missions, which will be found in subsequent section of this report.

[4] The enrolment figures include enrolment in the context of the Sucre mission.

These achievements have been realized owing in part to the fact that specific policies and strategies have been designed and implemented at all levels and modalities of the country's education subsystems.

Furthermore, in addition to the strategies that have been implemented in the formal education system, policies aimed at the social integration of individuals across the entire culture have been developed. The Bolivarian Revolution has consolidated cultural management throughout the country, developing a new infrastructure and new plans and programmes which stand in striking contrast to the management that characterized the previous decade.

Venezuela's achievements to date in all levels and modalities of the basic education system, the university education subsystem and the cultural sphere, and also the strategies that have enabled the country to turn itself into "the world's largest classroom" will be described in detail in the following pages.

A. Achievement and strategies in basic education

Under the Bolivarian Revolution, 1,502,688 children and adolescents have been integrated into the various levels of the basic education system. Between the 1998-99 and 2009-10 school years, school enrolment increased by 24 per cent, in contrast to the preceding decade: between the 1988-89 and 1997-98 school years, enrolment grew by only 10 per cent.

One strategy adopted by the Bolivarian Government to promote universal school enrolment at every level has been the abolition of registration fees at all State-run schools, including preschool, primary and intermediate institutions. This measure was adopted as a means of reversing the attempted privatization of education that was quite clearly under way before 1999.

Another important measure adopted by the Bolivarian Government has been the strenthening of the school meals programme. This programme has contributed significantly to the lower incidence of child malnutrition and the increased school enrolment, lower dropout and better performance rates that have been observable at all levels of the basic education system since 1999.

Correct nutrition is a fundamental strategic factor for school children, one that is critical to their integral development as human beings at every stage in their lives, and consequently it has a decisive positive impact on their physical development, growth and learning, and is reflected in lower repetition and dropout rates. Accordingly, the Bolivarian Government has expended and strengthened the school meals programme, which is designed for the benefit of children, adolescents and young people enrolled at State-run schools. Its objective is to ensure that their diet is varied, balanced, of high quality and suited to the nutritional, caloric and energy requirements of every age group. The programme also has an impact on family group dynamics, not only in the economic sphere but also in the matter of eating habits.

A total of 4,055,135 pupils benefited from the school meals programme in 2010, up from 119,512 in 1998, for an increase of 3,293 per cent in the course of the 11 years that have passed since the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Yet another measure that has had an impact at all levels of the basic education subsystem has been the introduction of preferential student bus tickets, a social

instrument designed to ensure that students can afford to use the public transport system by giving them reduced fares. All students attending State-run and private institutions, including universities, are eligible for these tickets.

One feature of the strategies that have been implemented in the basic education system has been the construction of 4,037 new State-run schools between 1998-99 and 2009-10, a figure that represents a 21 per cent increase in the country's stock of school buildings. Over the same period, there was only a 13 per cent increase in new school construction.

Numbers of teachers have increased by 161 per cent during the Bolivarian Revolution, with 494,534 teachers in 2009-2010, up from 189,172 in 1998. During the preceding period, in contrast, there was a 19 per cent decline in the numbers of Venezuelan teachers.

Preschool education

During the Bolivarian Revolution, the net preschool enrolment ratio has increased by 28 percentage points, from 43 per cent in the 1998-99 school year to 71 per cent in the 2009-2010 school year. During the preceding period, from 1988-89 to 1998-99, that ratio increased by only six percentage points, from 38 per cent to 43 per cent.

The net preschool enrolment ratio thus grew five times as fast as the corresponding figure for the preceding period. This achievement was due, first, to the Constitution's recognition of preschool education as the first compulsory level, second, to the abolition of registration fees at State-run institutions at that level, third, to the strengthening of the school meals programme, and finally, to the adoption of specific strategies at that level, including in particular the design and implementation of Project Simoncito. This is a project aimed at ensuring that all children between 0 and six years of age enjoy social, educational and dietary conditions that will enable them to grow, develop fully and advance to the primary education stage under conditions of equal opportunity.

Early in 1999, there were 11,546 preschool institutions; today, 11 years later, and following the introduction of Project Simoncito, there are 16,972 such institutions.

Primary education

At the primary education level, Venezuela has made progress toward the Millennium Development Goals in the field of education. The positive trend in the direction of universal primary education is observable from the net enrolment ratio, which is an indicator of Millennium Goal 2.

In the 2009-10 school year, the net primary-school enrolment ratio was 93 per cent. That is to say, out of every 100 children between 6 and 11 years of age who should have been attending school, 93 actually were doing so. This represents a 7 per cent increase over the 1998-99 school year, when the Bolivarian Revolution began.

This upward trend in the net primary-school enrolment ratio stands in contrast to the trend observed during the preceding period, when the ratio declined by 4 per cent, on average, from 90 per cent in the 1990-91 school year to 86 per cent in 1998-99.

As regards the second indicator for Millennium Goal 2, percentage of students who begin Grade 1 and reach the final grade of primary school in six years, it appears that during the period extending between the 2004-05 and 2009-10 school years (i.e. during the Bolivarian Revolution), 85 per cent of all pupils completed primary school in six years. However, taking the repetition factor into account, we find that over 97 per cent of all pupils completed primary school in six to eight years.

A comparison of this figure with the corresponding figure for the period before 1999, between the 1993-94 and 1998-99 school years, reveals that only 67 per cent of all pupils who began primary school completed it in six years.

During the Bolivarian Revolution, then, there has been an 18 per cent increase in the number of pupils who begin Grade 1 and continue to the final grade of primary school in six years, whereas the corresponding increase during the preceding period was a mere 1 per cent.

As we have seen, the increases observed for the net primary-school enrolment ratio and numbers of students beginning Grade 1 and completing primary school in six years show that Venezuela has made progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Another accomplishment that deserves notice is the behaviour of completion and dropout rates for that level.

For the 2008-2009 school year, the completion rate for primary education was 95 per cent. During the 1990s, the average value of this indicator was 85 per cent, while during the Bolivarian Revolution it has been 92 per cent, a figure that represents a 7 per cent increase.

The school dropout rate for the primary level averaged 2 per cent between 1998-99 and 2009-10, compared to 5 per cent in the previous decade. That is, there has been a 3 per cent decline from the former period to the latter.

These achievements have been realized partly owing to the above-mentioned education strategies, and partly to the introduction of Bolivarian schools and the integration of information and communication technology as a means of strengthening pupils' learning capacity.

The Bolivarian schools have been designed as a space for action to combat educational exclusion. They are characterized by all-day operation, so that children can spend the entire day at the school; this is a means of addressing a number of external factors that contribute to exclusion, such as poor nutrition and extreme poverty. At Bolivarian schools, children enjoy enhanced social protection services, including transport, meals, medical assistance, uniforms, scholarships, shoes, and educational and vocational guidance.

During the Bolivarian Revolution, 5,749 Bolivarian schools have been established as of the 2009-10 school year. Of these, 5,495 are primary schools, while 254 provide special education.

The Canaima educational project is a transforming experiment in curriculum development in Venezuela. Its aim is to support integral training for pupils by means of portable school computers with digitized educational content for teachers and pupils at the primary level. Canaimas are used in State-run schools throughout the country, and also at private schools that are subsidized by the State.

The project is being executed in the framework of the cooperation agreement between the Republic of Portugal and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. It comprises two components: (a) "Canaima at school", with the portable computers being kept at the school, and (b) "Taking Canaima home with me", with every primary-school pupil from Grade 2 through Grade 6 having a portable school computer, with educational content appropriate to his or her grade, at his or her disposal at all times.

The project was launched in 2009, and between that time and 2010, 382,708 Grade 1 and Grade 2 primary-level pupils at 11,432 schools have been supplied with portable computers; as of April 2011, a total of 743,887 computers had been made available. The goal for 2012 is to ensure that portable school computers are made available to the entire primary-level student population attending State-run schools and also private schools that are subsidized by the State.

Literacy is another of the Bolivarian Revolution's major achievements. Literacy rates for men and women between 15 and 24 years of age increased from 97.59 per cent in 1999 to 98.55 per cent in 2009.

The increase in the literacy rate is due to the success of the first Robinson Mission (Robinson I), which was launched in 2003 as a means of paying off the country's social debt in the area of education with which the Bolivarian Revolution was confronted at its inception, while also reducing the currently high social exclusion rates. The project has continued to this day, and as of 2010, 1,706,145 Venezuelans have learned to read and write. At the present time, 14,829 people are enrolled in the context of Robinson I.

The aim of Robinson I was the eradication of illiteracy. It was implemented with the support of the Republic of Cuba in the form of consultancy services and its "Yes I can" literacy method, which won a UNESCO literacy prize. The mission, which is the largest mass literacy programme organized in recent years, has developed in various settings in communities, including public schools, community facilities and public buildings.

The second Robinson mission (Robinson II) was launched in 2003 as a means of ensuring that pupils continued to Grade 6, including not only graduates from Robinson I, but all persons who had dropped out of formal education for any reason. Phase II of the Robinson mission is based on the "Yes I can continue" method[5].

In the framework of Robinson II, 577,483 Venezuelans had reached Grade 6 as of 2010. In that year, 297,833 individuals enrolled under the mission with a view to completing their primary education.

Some other achievements of these missions are outlined in the following paragraphs:

(a) The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela declared an illiteracy-free territory: on 28 October 2005, the Director-General of UNESCO sent a letter to the Minister of Education declaring Venezuela to be an illiteracy-free territory;

(b) Literacy training for indigenous peoples: as of 2010, a total of 68,495 individuals from a variety of ethnic groups, including the Kariña, Wuayúu, Piaroa, Yanomami, Guarao, Piapoco, Guarequena, Bari, Arauco, Pemón, Maquiritare,

[5] This method uses television, video classes and support brochures as its educational strategy.

Yucpa, Pume, Ye'Kwana and Jivi peoples, had learned to read and write. Of those individuals, 55 per cent were women and 45 per cent men. Furthermore, the educational materials of the "Yes I can" method had been translated into the Jivi, Ye'kwana, Kariña and Warao languages. At the present time, 32,880 indigenous persons are enrolled in the context of Robinson I;

(c) Inclusion of the prison population: the extension of the Robinson I and II missions to prisons has made it feasible to integrate the prison population into the Venezuelan education system, thereby enabling detainees to learn to read and write and continue to Grade 6 of the primary level, while the Ribas and Sucre missions perform the same function for the intermediate level and the university level respectively. As of 2010, 992 prison inmates have participated in Robinsons I and II, and at the present time, 2,050 inmates are pursuing their education at all levels;

(d) Integration of the population with special educational needs: the programme takes into account the special educational needs of persons with visual, motor, hearing-related and other disabilities who have been excluded from the education system. To that end, a number of tools requiring personalized attention have been developed to supplement the literacy process, notably sign language and the Braille system. For example, the "Yes I can" educational materials have been translated into Braille, along with various textbooks expressly designed for the special-needs population.

In this connection, 7,154 persons with hearing, visual, motor and cognitive disabilities had been integrated into the education system by 2010. In addition, persons with Down's syndrome and other learning difficulties have been taught to read and write in the context of the Robinson mission: programme contents are adapted to take each individual's specific needs into account, personalized attention is provided, and appropriate educational materials are used.

Intermediate education

For the 2009-10 school year, the net intermediate-level enrolment ratio was 72 per cent, a figure that represents a 24 per cent increase over the 48 per cent observed for the 1998-99 school year. During the decade preceding the Bolivarian Revolution, that ratio had increased by a mere 3 per cent, from 45 per cent to 48 per cent in 1998-99.

Dropout rates have been characterized by a downward trend during the Bolivarian Revolution, averaging 10 per cent since 1999, whereas the corresponding figure for the preceding decade was 17 per cent. A comparison of the two periods thus shows a 7 per cent reduction. For the 2008-2009 school year, the dropout rate for the intermediate level was 9 per cent.

Further evidence of Venezuela's transformation into "the world's largest classroom" may been seen in the increase in enrolment at the intermediate education level, including both the field of science and humanities and the field of technical training. For the former, enrolment increased from 322,075 students during the 1997-98 school year to 654,553 in the 2009-10 school year, for a gain of 98 per cent.

The corresponding figure for technical training was 76 per cent: total enrolment in this field was 122,027 in the 2009-2010 school year, up from 66,881 in 1997-98.

One particularly noteworthy strategy that has been implemented specifically at this educational level has been the establishment of Bolivarian secondary schools[6]. The objective of these schools is to ensure that students are prepared for the production system with a view to meeting human needs. To that end, sustainable, productive educational projects with socio-cultural relevance are designed and carried out. In the 2009-10 school year, there were a total of 1,549 Bolivarian secondary schools located throughout the country, with 667,087 students.

The new concept of education has been translated into practice through the Robinsonian technical schools project. In these schools, education and work are treated as processes that are fundamental to the task of maintaining and developing individuals and ensuring respect for human dignity. In 1998, when the Bolivarian Revolution began, Venezuela had 103 technical schools; by the 2009-10 school year, the total had grown to 340, for an increase of 230 per cent over that period. Two hundred and twenty-six of the country's technical schools, i.e. 67 per cent of the total, are Robinsonian schools.

Another strategy that has been implemented at this level has been the Ribas mission[7], which was launched in 2003. Its objective is to provide access to intermediate education for persons who never had an opportunity to complete the intermediate grades, or persons who were never able to enter intermediate school at all. The Ribas mission has enabled 632,623 Venezuelans to complete their intermediate education since 2005. At the present time, for the country as a whole, 462,251 students are enrolled, all of whom will obtain intermediate-school leaving certificates within two years.

Intercultural and bilingual intercultural education

The Bolivarian Revolution has introduced a number of different modalities in education, and one of these, bilingual intercultural education, represents significant progress in the development of the educational traditions of indigenous peoples and the strengthening and reinvigoration of their languages and cultures through education. The aim of this modality is to make education available for all in the context of a multiethnic, multicultural society, with recognition of cultural diversity.

One of the great achievements of the Bolivarian Revolution is that it has made room for the indigenous peoples, who had been excluded for over 200 years. Their right to be consulted has now been recognized in the Constitution, and they have been given a voice and enjoy full participation.

Some particularly significant innovations have been that indigenous languages must now be used at all public and private schools located in indigenous areas, including urban areas inhabited by indigenous people, the construction and rehabilitation of indigenous schools, which have been made ecologically, culturally and linguistically relevant, the production and publication of educational materials, both printed and audio-visual, in indigenous languages and in bilingual editions, and initial and continuing training for indigenous teachers.

In the 2009-10 school year, there were 656 indigenous schools, providing preschool, primary and intermediate education, within the geographic areas

[6] This term designates secondary schools that provide intermediate-level education.

[7] This mission features innovative distance teaching methods and is supported by facilitators, community organizations and official institutions.

inhabited by indigenous peoples in the States of Amazonas, Anzoátegui, Apure, Bolívar, Delta Amacuro, Mérida, Monagas, Sucre and Zulia. Total enrolment amounted to 68,520 indigenous children in that school year.

Outside geographic areas inhabited by indigenous peoples, 42,331 indigenous children are enrolled at 604 schools nation-wide. In all, 110,851 indigenous children are currently enrolled in the basic education subsystem.

Special education

The special education modality serves the population with special educational needs, from young children to adults. It also promotes the integration of special needs persons into other modalities of the education system at various levels. In the 2009-10 school year, a total of 207,265 children, adolescents and adults with various disabilities, including autism, hearing impairment, visual impairment, learning difficulties, physical handicaps, mental retardation and speech disorders were enrolled in special education schools and services.

The Bolivarian Revolution has made provision for all persons with special needs. Between the 1998-99 and 2009-10 school years, special education enrolment increased by 257 per cent, from 67,883 persons to 207,265.

In 2010, Venezuela has 956 special education institutes and educational units and 3,130 integrated classrooms. Integrated classrooms are located in regular schools, to serve pupils with any type of special educational needs. To that end, the special education teacher and the regular class teacher work as a team.

B. Achievements and strategies in university education

In 2003, a nation-wide debate involving all stakeholders in the university sector began in Venezuela. That debate centred on the epistemological, organizational and instructional models currently in use in the country's universities and the proposed new transformative options which were initially put into practice with the establishment of the Bolivarian University of Venezuela.

Not only has this process yielded significant contributions in the area of the legal and conceptual aspects of university life, it has also facilitated the establishment of an agenda for the transformation of the university subsystem, in accordance with the National Development Plan (2007-2013) and consistent with the results of international and regional conferences on the issue. The agenda in question includes social relevance, equity, quality and innovation, responsible autonomy, active, participatory internal democracy, the exercise of critical thinking, integral training, humanistic and ethical education, and lifelong education.

During the Bolivarian Revolution, significant progress has been made in the effort to encourage secondary-school graduates to go on to university. By 2010, it was clear that that effort had been successful, with 128,382 applicants having been admitted through the National Single University Education Registration System. Of those applicants, 1,217 are persons with disabilities and 2,702 are indigenous persons. Moreover, 2,335 of them are Ribas Mission graduates. It is also noteworthy that 52.4 per cent of these university places (67,323) have been assigned to high-school graduates from lower socioeconomic social strata. Here we see

evidence of a substantial gain in the process of integrating persons who have historically been marginalized.

In 2010, total university enrolment was 76 per 1,000 population, while the weighted average for the 12 years of the Revolution is 50 per 1,000 population. This is double the corresponding figure for the preceding decade, in which total university enrolment was 27 per 1,000 population.

Between 1998 and 2010, university enrolment grew by 192 per cent. In 1990, there were 537,698 students attending university, in 1998 there were 785,285, but by 2010 the total had grown to 2,293,914.

Of all university students in 2010, 70.3 per cent were attending State-run institutions, while 29.7 per cent were attending private institutions. There has thus been a substantial increase in enrolment at State universities during the period of the Bolivarian Revolution.

One of the Revolution's noteworthy achievements in the field of university education has been the recognition of Venezuela by UNESCO as the fifth-ranking country in the world, and the second-ranking country in Latin America and the Caribbean, in terms of its gross university enrolment rate, which is 85 per cent.

These achievements in the field of university education are due to the design and implementation of a number of strategies, including in particular the establishment of the Ministry of the People's Power for University Education, the municipalization of education at that level, and the Sucre and Alma Mater missions.

Establishment of the Ministry of the People's Power for University Education

The Bolivarian Revolution is characterized by an understanding of the strategic importance of university education for the social, political, economic and cultural transformation of the nation. In this framework, the Ministry of the People's Power for Higher Education was established on 8 January 2002. Upon the adoption of the Organic Law on Education in 2009, the Ministry was renamed the Ministry of the People's Power for University Education.

The municipalization of university education

Municipalization has been one of the fundamental guidelines and key strategies of the universal higher education policy adopted by the Bolivarian Revolution.

One aim of municipalization is to bring the university to the places where people live, in order to open its doors to all, regardless of age, family obligations, economic situation, or employment status. The university has been brought into communities so that it can be accessible to people who work, people who are have children to care for, people who are unable to travel far from home, and people who do not live in major urban areas.

In the framework of that strategy, the Sucre Mission was launched in 2003 with the objective of bringing university education to every municipality in the country on the basis of the needs and potential of the various regions, creating educational spaces to enable students to enrol in the various training programmes managed by universities.

Thanks to these municipal educational spaces, which are known as "university villages", university enrolment has increased from 785,285 students in 1998 to 2,293,914 in 2010.

In 2010, the Sucre Mission resulted in 462,199 students' taking university education, including 57,532 with scholarships and 10,047 of indigenous origin.

The difference in the geographic extension of university education before and since the Sucre Mission is striking. In 1998, access to education at that level was available only in large capital cities and in the north central coastal region; by 2010, it had become available throughout the country.

In 2010, a total of 57,023 students nation-wide obtained financial assistance through the Sucre Mission, including (a) 34,230 who received funding under national training programmes, (b) 14,319 who were enrolled in the first four years of the Integral Community Medicine Programme, and (c) 8,474 who were enrolled in the fifth year of that programme.

In 2004, 42,913 students took university education in the context of the Sucre Mission; by 2010, that figure had increased to 462,199.

A comparison of enrolment in the context of the Sucre Mission with enrolment at State-run universities reveals that in 2004, the former accounted for 5.9 per cent of the total; by 2010, that figure had increased to 40.4 per cent. Between 2008 and 2010, 128,410 students graduated under the Sucre Mission.

In 2009, in the framework of the transformation of university education that is being driven by the Sucre Mission, the Bolivarian Government launched the Alma Mater Mission, the aim of which is to promote institutional and geographic articulation along the lines laid down in the National Development Plan (2007-2013), under which the right to university education is available to all, none being excluded.

The components of the Alma Mater Mission are outlined in the following paragraphs.

(a) Conversion of State-run university institutes and colleges into national experimental universities. In 2010, six university institutes of technology were converted into the first six regional polytechnic universities in Apure, Aragua, Barinas, Barlovento, Lara, and the northern part of Táchira.

(b) The establishment of institutions of university education: five universities were established in Venezuela between 1989 and 1998, while between 1999 and 2010, the Revolution established 25 official institutions of university-level education. Nineteen of these are national experimental universities, of which the first was the Bolivarian University of Venezuela, founded in 2003, while the other six are conventional universities.

The establishment of specialized universities has been particularly noteworthy. These include the Experimental University of the Arts, the National Experimental University of Security, the Bolivarian Military University of Venezuela, the Venezuelan University of Hydrocarbons, the Jesús Rivero Bolivarian Workers' University, and the Sports University of the South. Other specialized institutions of university education have been established as well, including the Paulo Freire Latin

American Institute for Agroecology and the Mayor (AV) Miguel Rodríguez University Institute of Civil Aviation.

Two indigenous universities have also been founded: the Amazonas Regional University and the Tauca Indigenous University.

In 2008, as part of the Alma Mater Mission, the national training programmes were established at the initiative of the National Executive, acting through the agency of the Ministry of the People's Power for University Education. These programmes consist of a set of academic activities leading to degrees, diplomas or certificates attesting completion of a course of university-level studies, and were designed in cooperation with national institutions of university education. They conform to the main lines of the national socio-economic development plan. Each programme is administered within one of the educational spaces that have been established throughout the country.

The aim of the national training programmes is to serve as knowledge and learning networks for the generation, transformation and social appropriation of knowledge in the respective areas as a service to the nation. More particularly, the purpose is actively to promote articulation and cooperation among institutions of university education on a basis of solidarity, and to link university education with State bodies, enterprises and social organizations, depending on the relevance of the training and intellectual creation.

As of 2010, 32 national training programmes have been established in a variety of areas, including nursing, physiotherapy, rail transport, police work, tourism, workplace prevention and health, chemistry, music, visual arts, dance and theatre, information science, and geoscience, automotive and electronic engineering.

One national training programme that is particularly noteworthy is the National Integral Community Medicine Programme, the objectives of which are as follows: (a) to provide coverage tailored to the training needs of graduates in the field of integral community medicine, (b) to link teachers and graduates in social territories, and (c) to integrate scientific knowledge and popular wisdom within a single body of knowledge, having regard to respect for multicultural and multiethnic diversity and an overarching strategy of promoting health and quality of life.

As of April 2011, 27,018[8] students were enrolled in the National Integral Community Medicine Programme in 318 municipalities. Of these students, 8,581 had begun in June 2010 and were doing their hospital internships at 181 health centres throughout the country, distributed as follows:

Year of course	*Number of students*
First	4 083
Second	2 222
Third	2 834
Fourth	3 183
Fifth	6 491
Sixth	6 205

[8] Figure available as at April 2011.

C. Achievements and strategies in the cultural sphere

The democratization of culture and the integration of those population groups that have traditionally been excluded from the cultural sphere are objectives toward which tangible progress has been made in the course of the past 11 years.

This new approach to cultural activity in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has yielded a number of achievements, including in particular the establishment of 24 regional printing presses and a dedicated cultural press operation, which have made it possible to democratize books as an educational tool. The opening of 52 "southern bookshops" as distribution facilities and the establishment of 44 art shops have stimulated the creativity of writers and artisans. The founding of the Villa del Cine and the opening of 113 community cinemas, 16 regional cinemas and 15 institutional cinemas is abundant evidence of the Revolution's accomplishments in the sphere of audiovisual creation. In addition, 25 museums and art galleries, three archaeological parks and 11 cultural diversity centres have been founded.

With the implementation of Mission Culture and the introduction of a bachelor's degree in Education with a specialty in cultural development, Venezuela has endowed itself with an army of cultural facilitators working in 98 per cent of the country's municipalities, where they serve to foster a training process that integrates indigenous communities and Afro-Venezuelans while deeply respecting their ancestral knowledge and incorporating the resulting experience into various areas of knowledge.

Another significant achievement has been the State Foundation for the Venezuelan National System of Youth and Children's Orchestras, which in March 2011 became the Simón Bolívar Musical Foundation (Fundamusical Bolívar). Fundamusical Bolívar is a social initiative of the Venezuelan State that fosters the systematization of music instruction and the collective practice of music through the use of a symphonic orchestra and a choir as instruments of social organization and community development. The aim of this initiative is to use music as a means of integrating population groups that have been excluded from society, including primarily children and young people who live in poverty and are vulnerable. The Foundation was designed as a "school of social life", and at the present time just over 300,000 young persons and children are studying music under its auspices. A million Venezuelans are associated directly or indirectly with the system of youth and children's orchestras. The system, which seeks to combat poverty, has reaped many awards and won recognition world-wide, and has served as a model for other countries.

IV. Experiences in the framework of international cooperation

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has made solid, sustained progress in establishing sovereign bilateral and multilateral relations on a basis of solidarity and complementarity, in line with the National Development Plan (2007-2013). In the course of the past few years, Venezuela has intensified and diversified its foreign policy, thereby working effectively for a multipolar world, a Latin American and Caribbean union, and the establishment of strategic political, economic and cultural alliances with a view to fostering the proliferation of new power groupings and hence contributing to the advent of a new global geopolitical configuration.

In this context, education is a strategic factor for cooperation on a basis of solidarity and unity among peoples. Accordingly, interinstitutional relations and international mobility for students and instructors have been encouraged and joint training and research projects developed.

The strategic priority informing Venezuela's international cooperation effort in the field of education is relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, both bilateral (with Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Uruguay) and multilateral (in the context of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of the Americas (ALBA), the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR)). In addition, priority is given to South-South relations with Africa (Algeria, Angola, Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Libya, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Sahrawi Republic, Santo Tomé and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles and Sierra Leone), Asia and the Middle East (China, Vietnam, Iran, Palestine and Syria) and strategic European countries (Russia, France, Belarus, Italy and Ukraine).

Areas deemed to have priority for the establishment of international cooperation relations are food security and sovereignty, public health, education, culture, industrial information and communication technologies, engineering, infrastructure and housing, petroleum, gas and other sources of energy, social sciences, a new international geopolitical configuration, environmental development and tourism.

Venezuela's experiences in international cooperation in the field of education include those outlined below.

Cuba-Venezuela Integral Cooperation Agreement

The Integral Cooperation Agreement has been in effect for 10 years now, and it has enabled the peoples of Cuba and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to make new and significant gains in the field of education.

The first Robinson mission (Robinson I), which was the outcome of a joint effort backed by consistent, relevant Cuban assistance, enabled Venezuela to turn itself into an illiteracy-free territory and pay off a debt of neglect that had been owing to the Venezuelan people for over 40 years. The key to the success of that mission was the Cuban "Yes I can" method.

Venezuela has realized significant achievements in the field of university education since 2000, including in particular the introduction of undergraduate and postgraduate scholarships and the fact that 5,711 Venezuelans are pursuing postgraduate studies through the blended learning modality in use in Venezuela, which enables them to take one-week internships in Cuba in their various fields of knowledge.

In addition, the numbers of undergraduates studying in the Republic of Cuba has grown to 799.

Another aspect of university cooperation with Cuba is based on the view that public health is a fundamental human right and a social safeguard for citizens in their relations with the State. These condiderations, together with the example of

the successful founding of ALBA, prompted the establishment of the Dr. Alejandro Próspero Révérend Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM).

The name of ELAM pays tribute to the eminent French scientist who accompanied the Liberator, Simón Bolívar, in his later life as his personal physician. The school is an outgrowth of the emblematic humanitarian experience of the sister Republic of Cuba, which for decades has trained thousands of community doctors who are now caring for and curing many of their fellow-citizens, carrying the right to health into even the most impoverished corners of Latin America, the Caribbean and the entire world.

ELAM has an international student body, operating as it does in the context of South-South integration. Students are trained in primary care, prevention, and health promotion. ELAM also works closely with the National Integral Community Medicine Programme and the Barrio Adentro Mission, which provide training for professionals who subsequently go to work for the public national health system.

At ELAM, students take six months of premedical training and six years of professional practice in academic venues in communities throughout the country (the municipalization of education), including multipurpose halls, community centres, Barrio Adentro people's clinics, integral diagnostic centres, integral rehabilitation centres, high-technology centres and people's hospital, among others.

Cooperation agreement between the Republic of Portugal and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

One result of the agreement signed between the Government of Portugal and the Government of Venezuela has been that many children and teachers at the basic education level have obtained portable computers under the Canaima educational project; the computers in question were developed in Portugal and assembled in Venezuela. The design of the operating system for these portable devices was integrated with the digital resources generated by the Ministry of the People's Power for Education.

Cooperation agreement between the People's Republic of China and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

With the support of the People's Republic of China, Venezuela developed the Simón Bolívar satellite known as VENESAT-1. The project featured Venezuela's first satellite, which was placed in orbit in 2008, enabling the country to expand its satellite network and provide telecommunications services to areas that are relatively inaccessible, with priority given to the education sector, among others.

In the area of education, the satellite has had a significant impact on integration, as is apparent from the interconnection of 1,012,260 users with a total of 1,928 educational establishments, including 537 Bolivarian information and communication technology centres, 513 Infocentres, 505 schools, including 95 that are already included in the Canaima educational project, 288 parochial management centres, 36 Sucre Mission centres, and 39 other educational establishments.

The aim of the Infocentre programme is to provide community centres with free Internet access, based on open-source software; technological literacy courses are also available to members of the public at these centres. The opening of 737 Infocentres and technological literacy training for some 1,097,000 persons won

recognition in 2010 in the form of the UNESCO King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa Prize for the use of information and communication technologies in education.

Another of this project's significant achievements has been training for 90 Venezuelan professionals, including 60 who were trained in the satellite's operational and teleport areas and 30 doctoral students at the University of Aeronautics and Astronautics. There will be Venezuela's future scientists.

Grand National ALBA-Education project

In the framework of the Grand National ALBA-Education project, a number of common undergraduate and postgraduate training programmes have been designed for the ALBA countries. These are known as "grand national training programmes" in the fields of the geopolitics of hydrocarbons, education, integral community medicine, tourism, and agriculture and food sovereignty. Furthermore, the Agreement on the Recognition of University Degrees and/or Diplomas among the ALBA member countries has been signed and ratified, with a view to facilitating student mobility and recognition of their educational attainments in their countries of origin.

International scholarships programme

The international scholarships programme is a feature of the Bolivarian Government's South-South cooperation effort. It was launched in 2005, and to date has provided scholarships for more than 2,800 students from 42 Latin American, Caribbean and African countries who are enrolled in 106 training programmes at 38 universities.

The areas of knowledge taught to international students vary, depending on what careers are deemed strategic by their respective countries of origin, with a view to enabling the students subsequently to contribute to the productive social development of their native lands. Common choices include careers in the social sciences, medicine, agricultural science, engineering in various fields, education sciences, and computer science.

Agreements on the recognition of university degrees

In the framework of the new geopolitics of the south (Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the Middle East), work is continuing on degree recognition agreements with the various sister countries with a presence in Venezuela's universities, based on the principles of quality and social relevance and with a clear orientation toward the strengthening, credibility and strategic positioning of the Bolivarian Revolution on the international scene.

Cooperation with Africa

In the field of university education, a total of 271 undergraduate scholarships have been awarded to young students from 16 African countries (Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Libya, Namibia, Nigeria, Sahrawi Republic, Santo Tomé and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Angola, Mozambique and Gambia) with a view to strengthening their training in fields that are strategically important for their countries. Once they have completed their studies, they will be able to return home and use their knowledge to bring about meaningful change in their societies.

Agreements on university-level educational materials have been signed with four African countries: Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Libya and Namibia, and one degree recognition agreement has been signed with Gambia. These represent a significant achievement ensuring the effectiveness of the cooperation effort.

The International Robinson Mission

The International Robinson Mission was launched in the framework of ALBA on 19 March 2006. Its aim is to promote cooperation and exchanges of experience in the fields of education and sports with Latin American and other countries around the world that require the implementation of literacy and integral education programmes. At the present time, Venezuelans are working as volunteers in the context of this mission in the Republic of Bolivia and the Republic of Nicaragua.

V. Remaining challenges

The Bolivarian Revolution is still confronted with a number of challenges. Foremost among these is the need to continue making progress with the rehabilitation of State-run school buildings used for preprimary, primary and intermediate education, including Simoncitos, Bolivarian schools, Bolivarian secondary schools and Robinsonian technical schools respectively.

A second remaining challenge is the need to reduce the number of pupils per classroom at the basic education level, mainly in urban areas. This will entail the construction of new school buildings.

A further significant challenge for the Bolivarian Revolution is further progress with curriculum design based on humanistic values, characterized by respect for cultural diversity and multiculturalism, taking into account the social focus of science, promoting love for one's country, and pursuing sustainable development. This implies a need to progress along integrating lines in curriculum development and the relevant aspects as summarized in various publications, including studies on educational orientations for integral risk management in the basic education subsystem of the Venezuelan education system, the main lines of bilingual intercultural education curricula, strategic guidelines for sexual education curricula, and draft fundamental elements for strategic curriculum orientations relating to human rights and values in the basic education subsystem.

In the case of the university subsystem, one of the main challenges facing the Bolivarian Revolution, and one that must be addressed, is the universalization of education at that level. In addition, increased access to the postgraduate level and diversification at that level are important, in accordance with the national development plan (2007-2013).

The last of the major remaining challenges that the Bolivarian Government will have to confront in the years ahead is the task of integrating this large contingent of university graduates into the workforce.

One challenge relating to the bilingual intercultural modality is how to extend it to as many indigenous persons as possible, motivate them to pursue their optimal integration into the education system and thereafter, and stimulate them to preserve their traditions and customs.

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